News release

Our future climate

20 March 2003

Over the next few decades the ways we live and play look set to change dramatically because of climate change. In the UK warmer and drier summers will have affected some of the nation's favourite pastimes. The existence of the traditional English country garden, parks, cricket pitches and bowling greens will all be threatened by summer water shortages. But, as weather organisations around the world commemorate World Met. Day on 23 March climate scientists at the Met Office maintain there is hope, if people are prepared to take notice of the warnings and reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and their dependence on fossil fuels.

Each year, on 23 March, the international body that unites all the meteorological services around the world, the World Meteorological Organization, commemorates its formation with World Met. Day. This year the theme being highlighted is *our future climate* and meteorologists around the world have been exchanging personal views on how life could be at the end of the century.

In Canada for example, leisure activities may have to take place either inside, or within enclosures protected by mosquito nets and on artificial turf, and watersports will be out because water levels in many lakes and rivers will have dropped below today's levels. Meanwhile in Switzerland skiing could die out as a national sport because of lack of snow, perhaps to be replaced by sailing.

In New Zealand the climate will be more tropical. While Hokitika on the west coast will be much wetter, places such as Canterbury in the east will have long, harsh droughts.

The Met Office has been investigating climate change for more than 20 years. Using predictions from its global models climate scientists are investigating scenarios of how climate will develop in the future. The global temperature is set to rise by between 1.5 and 5.8°C and sea level by between 10 and 90 cm, as a result of global warming. The impacts, particularly of changes in rainfall, could be severe, especially in many developing countries. One thing that is becoming obvious is that, although the climate has always changed naturally, human activity is now the cause of major change.

Simon Brown, a climate research scientist at the Met Office's Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research, said: "The climate models are clearly telling us that if the world economies grow rapidly and are based predominantly on the burning of fossil fuels then the resulting climate change is likely to be substantial. However, it is possible to mitigate the worst of the warming, to perhaps as little as a degree or two globally. The next 50 years will be crucial in setting the agenda for what climate change we will see."

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